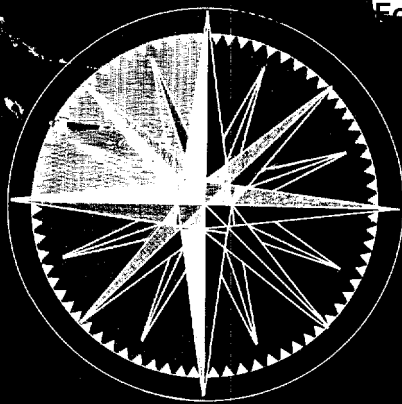


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THE COMMUNIST CHALLENGE IN INDIA

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SECRET**THE COMMUNIST CHALLENGE IN INDIA**

The principal internal subversive threat against the democratic government of India comes from domestic Communist forces. The Indian Communists, concentrated mainly in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, and West Bengal, have among all other opposition groups the greatest will and capacity to undermine the country's democratic institutions. For over 40 years they have based their political programs on exploiting the discontent among the poorer classes, the urban middle class, and the unemployed intellectuals.

The Indian Communist movement has been weakened by intense factionalism among the Communist forces, by government suppression of militant elements, and by some popular disenchantment in India's population, but the Communists have managed to maintain substantial popular support. In the forthcoming mid-February general elections, the Communists--now split into two rival parties--will be attempting to extend further their influence by capitalizing on the prevailing atmosphere of unrest and dissatisfaction with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's Congress Party government.

Both parties in the early pre-election period have vociferously attacked the domestic policies of the Gandhi government--especially the actions taken last spring to liberalize the economy--and have moved quickly to support the plethora of popular grievances on both the national and state level. At the same time, there is little prospect, because of factionalism within and between the rival Communist parties, that they will be able to forge a national electoral front either between themselves or with other left-wing parties. However, in at least one state--Kerala--the leftist Communist Party of India (CPI/L) seems assured of an impressive victory at the polls.

Strengths and Vulnerabilities

The Indian Communists operate in a favorable environment for their purposes. The cultural linguistic, racial, and religious heterogeneity of India provides an ideal arena in which dissident

groups may agitate for a wide variety of political demands. Such groups, while frequently having independent grievances unrelated to Communist goals, stand as ready-made instruments for exploitation. Self-dedication--the backbone of any Communist movement--

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is firmly imbedded in the political and religious traditions of India.

Among the educated and politically active segments of the population there exists an ambivalent emotional attitude toward the West stemming from the experience of colonial rule and from India's increasing dependence on the West for economic development, food, and much of its military security. Though the present constitutional system is not subject to widespread criticism, there is a strong undercurrent of dissatisfaction with the general state of the Indian Government and the economy.

Despite these conditions, the Indian Communists--active since the late 1920s--have failed to forge a united party capable of challenging the political dominance of the Indian National Congress (Congress Party). India's very heterogeneity, while providing a continuing threat to political stability, serves to divide the Communists as well. In the political sphere, India's commitment to democracy--however circumscribed it may be in practice--inhibits Communist efforts. Since independence the domination of politics by the Congress Party--a broad-based, nondogmatic organization--has stunted the growth of Communism in many parts of the country.

More important, perhaps, as an inhibiting factor has been the long history of intense internal party factionalism which in the summer of 1964 resulted in the splitting of the Communist Party of India (CPI) into two rival overt parties--the leftists (CPI/L)

and the rightists (CPI/R). Contrary to similar developments in some other free world Communist parties, the split in the CPI was not directly precipitated by the Sino-Soviet rift nor did it develop along strictly pro-Moscow and pro-Peking lines. Its origins were more deeply imbedded instead in personality clashes among the leadership, in differing views on how to deal with the Indian political situation, and in conflicting concepts of appropriate tactics. These surfaced even before the schism between the Soviet Union and the Chinese Communists.

The Chinese Communists did play an important, if indirect, role in hastening the CPI split when they invaded northern India in October-November 1962. The attack, viewed by and large in India as blatant aggression against an unsuspecting and peaceful neighbor, not only lessened the CPI's appeal to the masses, but also pushed to the breaking point the existing divisive forces as some party leaders jockeyed for acceptable ideological positions to avoid incarceration by a suddenly malevolent government.

The exact role of Communism at present in the national life of India is difficult to define in absolute terms. Communist influence and power varies considerably throughout the country. In two areas of greatest Communist influence (West Bengal and Kerala), the leftist grouping is the dominant Communist party. In another stronghold, Andhra Pradesh, the two CPIs are about evenly divided. In other areas where Communist influence is of any importance at all the rightist faction is likely to be the dominant element. Generally

SECRET

SECRET

the Communists have been least successful in the Hindustani-speaking areas of northern India which traditionally are the center of India's political and military power.

The bulk of Communist support apparently comes from the poorer segments of the population, though many members and a number of influential leaders are drawn from the middle class and the educated unemployed. The social and economic character of the Communists' backing varies widely, however, from area to area. For example, much of the Communist support in West Bengal comes from urban middle-class clerical workers whereas in Kerala the low-caste landless peasants form the backbone of party cadre.

Though popular support for the Communists is nowhere near that of the Congress Party, the Indian Communists have been able to exercise a degree of influence disproportionate to their relatively small numbers (about 160,000 card-carrying members, about equally divided between the CPI/R and the CPI/L). Neither Communist party is capable alone or in collaboration of challenging the ruling Congress Party in the central legislature, but skillful use of parliamentary procedure--especially by the CPI/R--has enabled the Communists to assume considerable importance in the public mind. Communist influence on policy, on the other hand, has been small.

The Communists have probably exercised more influence on the state and local level than at the

center. Better discipline and often superior leadership have enabled them on occasion to take advantage of the less sophisticated non-Communist parties. However, because the Communists focus on national and state elections, their power in local bodies has tended to be irregularly distributed and is concentrated mainly in Kerala, West Bengal, and Andhra Pradesh.

Strategy

Communist strategy in India has varied considerably over the years. Insurrection, the formation of united fronts, electoral campaigns, strikes, and protest demonstrations, as well as covert infiltration and subversion of existing governmental institutions, have at various times reflected the Communists' evaluation of the Indian political situation. Frequently the Communists have been willing to adopt a pragmatic line when their survival was at stake, later rationalizing it in Marxist terms.

The CPI/R as the vestige which continues the policies of the united CPI has generally tended toward a more moderate approach than the breakaway CPI/L. The rightists seem more willing for tactical purposes to cooperate with "progressive" elements in the Congress Party, to seek power principally by legal means, and in general to follow the advice of the Soviet Union. Their principal illegal efforts have been aimed at espionage.

The leftists, when not suppressed by the government, tend to take a more militant line and an

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independent approach, eschewing cooperation with the Congress Party and being more likely to resort to violence and illegal activity. Subject to greater government harassment, they place more reliance on covert organization. Indicative of its orientation, the CPI/L's basic slogan of "Peoples Democracy" implies the overthrow of the "bourgeois-landlord" state by the workers and peasants. Contrary to the program of the CPI/R, the leftists allow no role in the coming revolution for the "progressive" Indian bourgeoisie.

Within both parties, however, there are high-ranking dissenters from these prevailing outlooks, and policy apparently is far from settled. The CPI/L leadership in particular is at odds in several vital policy areas, and government harassment has interfered with the efforts of these leaders to settle their differences. In late 1964 and early 1965, before the CPI/L was thoroughly organized and its leaders had time to thresh out policy decisions, all the party's key leaders, with the exception of two relative moderates, were arrested. The last of them was released only last spring.

At the first politburo meeting in May and at subsequent meetings, leftist leaders were noticeably split over the use of violence and the proper party approach to the 1967 general elections. At the same time, the CPI/R--enticed by the prevailing atmosphere of unrest in the early pre-election period and alarmed at the apparent drift to the right of the Gandhi government--has recently shifted toward a more militant approach.

Leftist Tactics

Two powerful schools of thought have developed within the CPI/L regarding the February elections. One view advocates close electoral cooperation with the CPI/R and other opposition parties. Politburo members E. M. S. Namboodiripad of Kerala and Jyoti Basu of West Bengal, are the main proponents of this approach. They would hope to weaken the Congress Party at the national level, even unseat it, and form coalition governments in as many states as possible.

Opposing them are politburo member Promode Das Gupta and central committee member Hare Krishna Konar, among others who effectively control the party organization in West Bengal. As old-line revolutionaries, they oppose the use of the ballot box as a means to power, believing that electoral collaboration with other opposition parties--especially the CPI/R--is corrupting. They see the election campaign as a vehicle for propagating the party's message. They hope through campaigning to recruit sympathizers who can perform useful operational tasks--providing safe havens, secret communications, and other services--should the party be suppressed again by the government. Since most other politburo members fall somewhere between these two extremes, it is probable that each CPI/L state unit will make its own decision on this issue.

The split in the CPI/L over the election tactics is paralleled by the disagreement over the use of violence. Those who prefer to

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seek power through democratic processes tend to feel that the masses are "lacking in revolutionary consciousness," and that it is premature to attempt to provoke them to use violence against class enemies. The Das Gupta/Konar school, on the other hand, claims that the revolutionary consciousness of the masses is at times better developed than that of some of the CPI/L comrades and seems to have no compunction over inciting violent action. The extremists realize, however, that organization must precede action, and that cadres must be trained and able to operate securely before they can be used effectively in illegal activities.

It can be assumed therefore that the West Bengal CPI/L organization, if not other state units, although unlikely to indulge in widespread violence in the pre-election period, will place a high priority on developing a clandestine capability in the Bolshevik mold. Namboodiripad's powerful Kerala unit, on the other hand, is in a position to dictate terms to the CPI/R and, to a somewhat lesser extent, to other opposition parties. It will employ covertness largely as a defensive measure and will rely on parliamentary means to gain power.

Increasing CPI/R Militancy

The CPI/R has shifted toward a more militant approach in the early pre-election period. At a week-long session of its senior policy-making body last spring, the CPI/R leadership declared open conflict against Prime Minister Gandhi. Controversial

party chairman S. A. Dange, who earlier this year saw "progressive" tendencies in Mrs. Gandhi, now dubs her as pro-American, capitulating to the pressures of the Indian "monopolists" and the United States. Concentrating their attacks on the government's efforts to liberalize the economy, party propaganda organs have been especially critical of the devaluation of the rupee last June.

Fundamentally, however, the CPI/R regards the 1967 elections as a struggle it must win, not against the Congress Party, but against the CPI/L. Despite pious talk about leftist unity, party leaders are hoping to score substantially better than the CPI/L and thereby win for the CPI/R formal recognition as the "official" CPI from most, if not all, fraternal parties. State-level electoral understandings with formerly abhorred "communal" parties such as the Muslim League and with the "reactionary" Swatantra Party now are condoned by the CPI/R.

Encouraged by the prevailing atmosphere of unrest in many parts of India and hopeful of reviving the sluggish party organization, the CPI/R has undertaken a series of strikes, demonstrations, and other forms of popular agitation. 25X1

The changed attitude of the CPI/R

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is also reflected in the lower house of Parliament, where party parliamentarians, working with the small Samyakta Socialist Party, have engaged in sustained efforts to defame leading members of the government and disrupt normal proceedings.

Communist Election Prospects

The mid-February 1967 general elections will be the Communists' first nationwide test of strength at the polls since the Chinese Communist invasion of 1962 and the formal split in the movement in 1964. Both Communist parties in the early pre-election period have attempted to exploit the divisive forces within the Congress Party, to discredit the Gandhi government, and to capitalize on popular grievances.

Reaction against Indian Communism resulting from the deterioration of India's relations with Communist China since the last general election is unlikely to be a decisive factor next February. Popular support for Indian Communism is substantial and has remained loyal even in periods of increased anti-Communist activity by the government.

The negative effects of the ideological and organizational split of the Indian Communist movement at the national level are somewhat mitigated by the geographical distribution of Communist influence. The power of the old left and right factions of the united CPI tended to be concentrated on a geograph-

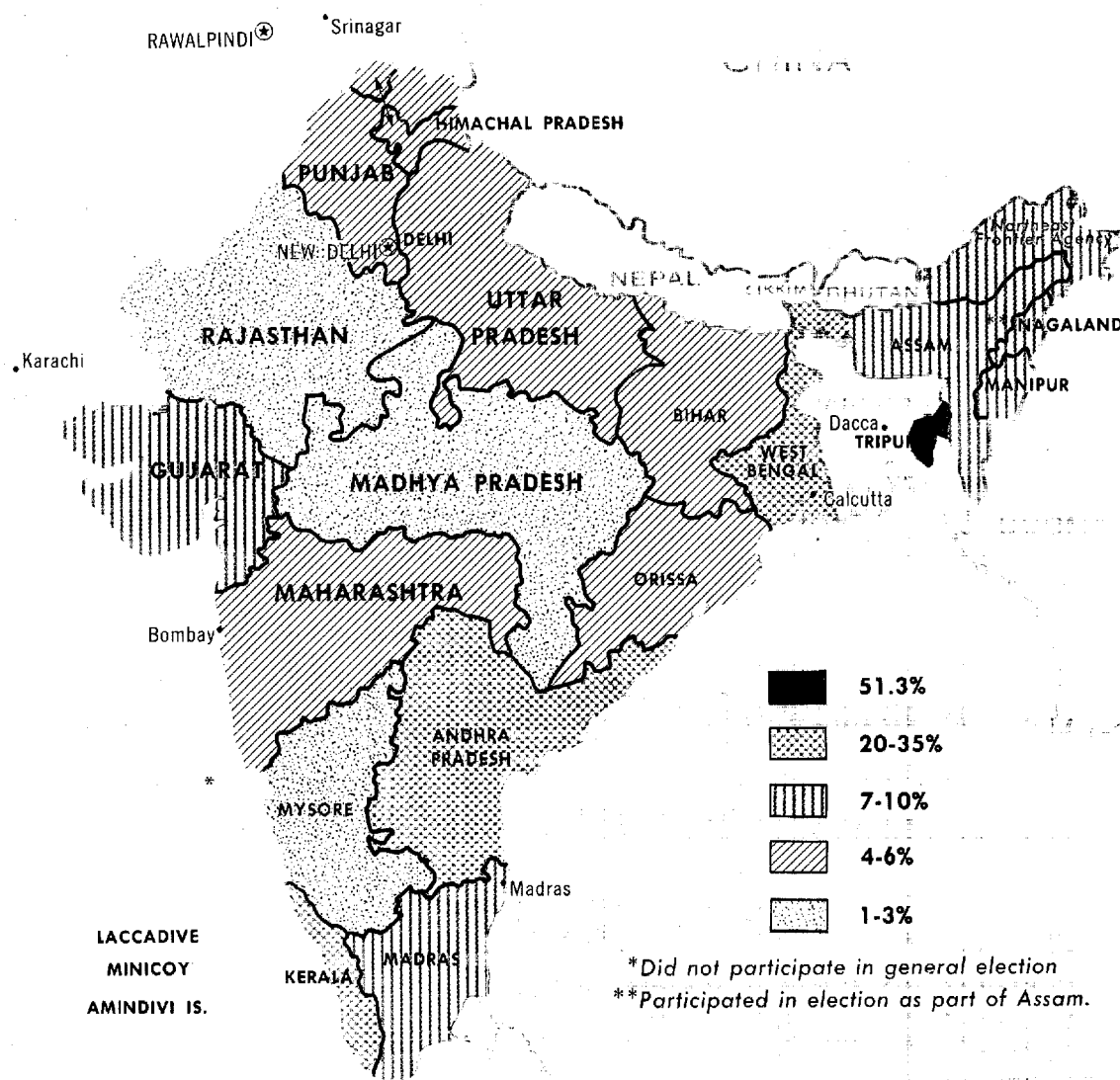
ical basis. Thus the split on the national level does not necessarily split Communist adherents in local constituencies. Also, Communist propaganda activity, whether from the left or the right, is concentrating on criticism of the Gandhi government and of Indian cooperation with the United States.

The Communist vote on the national level may shift a bit between the rival Communist parties, but it is unlikely that there will be a significant change in the total Communist representation in the lower house of Parliament (30 in 1962) or in the percentage of the popular votes they garner (10.3 percent in 1962). (See Map.) The Communists--like the other opposition parties--appear to be focusing their efforts on the state assembly elections where they have the greatest chance of scoring significant gains or even coming to power. In most other areas they have little more than paper organizations and will present only token challenges to the ruling Congress Party.

Communist electoral strength has traditionally been centered in Kerala, West Bengal, and Andhra Pradesh. Prior to the 1964 split, the Communists were the main political opposition party in all three states. The CPI/L has inherited the bulk of the original party's following in Kerala and West Bengal, while in Andhra Pradesh the two warring state units are about evenly matched. In northern India, the Communists hold pockets of strength

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Percentage of Communist Vote in 1962 General Elections



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in most states but these amount to little in terms of any challenge they could mount through the electoral process. Western and central India is similarly a largely barren area for the Communists.

Andhra Pradesh is an extreme example of the debilitating effect of divisive forces within the Indian Communist movement on Communist electoral prospects. Both Communist parties in Andhra Pradesh have been largely preoccupied over the past two years with mutual recriminations and character assassinations. A movement which at one time was monolithic, disciplined, and capable of getting over 20 percent of the popular vote, has lost considerable prestige. Even if some electoral arrangement was patched together, local cadres would probably find it difficult to overlook their differences and to work together.

In West Bengal, where the Congress Party has pre-empted the right and center, the CPI/L is the largest opposition party and the only one with an effective political organization. However, for the Communists seriously to challenge the entrenched Congress Party government in the 1967 elections they must collaborate with the other opposition parties. Fortunately for the Congress Party, the West Bengal CPI/L leaders themselves have been badly divided on this key question. It now appears that those who would eschew close electoral ties with other leftist opposition parties --particularly the CPI/R--have won their point. The West Ben-

gal CPI/L party seems to have decided against close collaboration with the other leftists, and may in fact hotly campaign against certain CPI/R candidates. In so doing, the party's main objective would not be to come to power by parliamentary means, but to use the campaign as an opportunity for political education and agitation. Earlier this year a United Left Front under the leadership of the CPI/L was able to bring off impressive mass demonstrations and strikes, but there now is little prospect that it will turn into an effective electoral alliance.

Seeing the coming election battle as primarily an opportunity for documenting their degree of mass support, the West Bengal extreme left parties--especially the CPI/L--are concentrating their activities in the state's populous urban areas. A large leftist vote in the cities would dramatize the left's degree of popular following and its capacity to organize protest movements that could threaten law and order. To counter this aspect of the leftist challenge, the Congress Party must make a respectable urban showing. Should Congress fail to do well in these areas, the result could be a self-confident and more united left, spearheaded by the CPI/L, working to exploit the deepening frustrations which afflict West Bengal's urbanites.

Kerala--Communist Showcase

The Communists will almost certainly score their most important victories in Kerala, a small but densely populated state

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of 20 million persons in southwest India. The state manifests in an acute form many of the economic, political, and social problems that pervade India. In addition, communal and caste rivalries and a vacuum of Congress Party political leadership have rendered the state unusually vulnerable to Communist penetration.

Economic difficulties lie at the root of Kerala's troubles. Underemployment and unemployment are probably the highest in all of India. A chronic food deficit state, last year's drought hit Kerala's rice-eating population especially hard.

The Keralans are the best educated group in the country--almost 50 percent are literate as compared with an average of about 25 percent for all of India--and consequently are more readily reached in exploitation of their grievances and hardships.

An intense rivalry among the various castes and religious communities has been the principal reason for Communist electoral successes in Kerala over the past decade. Four principal groups vie for political influence. The largest of these, the low-caste Hindu Ezhavas, are primarily landless agricultural laborers. Most Ezhavas look to the Communists as the group most likely to improve their depressed condition.

The Kerala Congress Party, on the other hand, had traditionally been controlled by Christian and high-caste Nair elements. Past Congress vic-

tories have been achieved only when the party has been able to win over substantial portions of the Ezhava community without alienating the Nairs and Christians.

The large Muslim community, nearly 20 percent of the population, further complicates the political picture. Seeking security against the distrust and hostility of the Hindu majority, the Muslims tend to support either the Muslim League--the Kerala unit is the only effective branch of the party remaining in India--or the avowedly "non-communal" CPI/L.

As a result, political stability has been unknown ever since Kerala was constituted in its present form in 1956. The first Communist government was formed in 1957, when the minority CPI was able to exploit Congress Party weakness and mass discontent sufficiently to form a state government. The Communists were ousted in 1959 by a combination of popular resistance followed by intervention from New Delhi, but the coalition government that succeeded them was short lived. The Congress government that followed was brought down in September 1964 when the party's delicate communal balancing act--an Ezhava chief minister, a Christian home minister, and a Nair party president--was toppled by the defection of Christians and Nairs who feared the increasing strength of the Ezhava chief minister.

The March 1965 state election was an exercise in futility.

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The two largest parties, Congress and the CPI, had each split into mutually hostile groups. Coalescing with minor parties, they fought the ensuing electoral battle to a standstill and no party or coalition achieved a majority. The state has been governed since then directly by the Congress-controlled national government (under a constitutional device known as "president's rule").

The national Congress Party hierarchy apparently has already written off Kerala as a lost cause in 1967. The state unit of the Congress Party is still split into two factions and has failed to gear up its organization to meet the threat from the CPI/L. Meanwhile, an electoral alliance (The United Front) led by the clever CPI/L leader E. M. S. Namboodiripad and including the decimated CPI/R, the Samyukta Socialist Party, the Muslim League and three minor parties, has been forged. There is still a dim possibility that the rival Congress groups may be able to paper over their differences, but the United Front--barring an unforeseen split in their ranks--is in any case expected to win a majority in the legislative assembly. It is not clear whether Communist former chief minister Namboodiripad plans once more to take the state's top job, or whether he will play a more cautious game by allotting the

chief ministership to one of his non-Communist partners.

Outlook

It is unlikely that the feuding Communist parties will be able to patch up their differences in the foreseeable future. Though the two parties will doubtless cooperate whenever this is to their clear mutual advantage, there is no sign they are prepared to form a national electoral front. In the areas of greatest Communist strength--Kerala and West Bengal--the CPI/L dominates the relationship and shows no inclination to allow the CPI/R to rebuild its popular following. In these areas in particular the CPI/R is clearly fighting for its continued existence as an independent party.

Whether Kerala is a special case or a weather vane of the future is the single most important question for both the Indian Communists and the ruling Congress Party. Many of the factors favoring a Communist electoral victory in Kerala apply elsewhere in varying degrees, but others are unique to Kerala. The postelection strategy adopted here by the Communists--as well as that followed by the new Congress Party government in New Delhi--will have an impact on the future course of Communism throughout India.

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